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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

18 JULY, 1980

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Out of time and into poetry

By Julian Symons

JOYCE PIEL WEXLER:
Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth
166pp. Ohio University Press. £7.20.
0 8214 0364 8

"Laura Riding is not well known today", Joyce Piel Wexler says in the first sentence of her book, and on the same page calls her a minor literary figure, although "there is nothing minor about her poetry". It is true that this is the first book about her work, but if one bears in mind the fact that she has published no new poems since 1939, critical attention has not been lacking, at least in this country. The reissue in 1970 of a small selection from her work produced at least three long, serious articles, by Roy Fuller in *The Review*, Michael Kirkham in *The Cambridge Quarterly* and Donald Davie in the *TLN*. It is true, however, that dramatic events in her life, mythically known about, have tended to obscure views of her work. True also, as Joyce Wexler shows, that her attempted suicide in 1929 had a vital importance in changing her approach to poetry and in affecting the poems she wrote. Knowledge of the life can say nothing about the quality of the poetry, but does help to explain its nature.

Laura Reichenthal was born in New York seventy-nine years ago. Her father was an Austrian Jewish tailor of socialist sympathies, who hoped that his daughter might become an American Rosa Luxemburg; her mother was an invalid and hypochondriac. Laura became her father's intellectual companion, but in her mid-teens repudiated this social idea. She won the Guggenheim scholarship to Cornell, and married a history instructor there named Louis Gottschalk. The marriage did not last, and is omitted from her entry in *Who's Who*. When she began to publish poems in 1923 she used the name Laura Riding Gottschalk, and continued to do so until after the publication of her first book *The Close Chapter* in 1926. Riding was apparently an assumed name, although it is the one by which she has become known.

Her first strong literary association was with the group of Southern poets called the Fugitives, who awarded her their Nashville Prize in 1924. "You are the one to save America from the Edna Millays!" Allen Tate told her. There was, however, little common ground between writers who were essentially at this time fugitives from the Old South and a New Yorker of Jewish origin who was already theorizing about bringing an ideal order into life through poetry, and she stopped submitting her work to the group when some of her poems were rejected by their magazine *The Fugitive*. In 1924 Robert Graves read her poem "The Quicks" with admiration, wrote to her, and after some correspondence suggested that she should come to England to collaborate with him on a book about modern poetry. She accepted, arrived in England in 1926 and began an association that lasted thirteen years.

The unconventional nature of the Graves household is suggested by the fact that Robert's wife Nancy insisted on keeping her maiden name of Nicholson. Nevertheless, the addition of a woman at that time ardently romantic in temperament must have placed a strain on this collection of three poets and four Graves children. The Riding-Graves literary partnership was launched in 1927 with *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, and the small Seizin Press was founded. Wexler tells us that for three years there was an arrangement by which Riding, Graves and Nancy Nicholson alternately cared for the children, both at a country home and on a Thames houseboat, while the Seizin Press was installed on two floors of a house in St Peter's Square. The arrangement worked well. Riding, Graves and Nicholson were able to pursue their interests, separately when relieved of responsibility for the children, yet they could spend time together when they chose.

Late in 1928 or early in the following year a serpent entered this triangular Eden, in the form of a young Irishman named Geoffrey Phibbs. The short story writer Frank O'Connor has left a vivid portrait of Phibbs in his autobiography *My Father's Son*. He was the eldest son of a Sligo land-owner, "tall and thin and dark, with a long lock of black hair that fell over one eye, a stiff, abrupt manner, and a rather insolent air". There was, O'Connor thought, something vaguely satanic about Phibbs, he "had a sort of animal beauty and a touch of animal cruelty.... Later, when I read Pound, I knew exactly what Saint-Loup must have looked like". Phibbs read a great deal of modern poetry and, although married to an attractive Irish painter, admired above all other poets "an American woman of whom we were both to learn a great deal more". O'Connor called her only "the Woman poet", contrary to what Wexler suggests, but she has been identified elsewhere, particularly in T. S. Matthews's *Jacks or Better*.

According to Laura Riding, Phibbs wanted to become part of the household after only a single visit to St Peter's Square. He had poetic credentials of a kind not mentioned by Wexler nor, strangely enough, by O'Connor, who regarded himself at this time as Phibbs's closest friend. His first—and only—collection of poems, *It Was Not Jones*, had recently been published as the second volume in the new "Hogarth Living Poets" series. The publication was pseudonymous, under the name of R. Fitzgibbon. Name and title were typical of Phibbs in their blend of mock-grandeur and ironic deflation. *It Was Not Jones* seems to have died unnoticed, yet these are original and entertaining minor poems. Some of their quietness and flippancy comes through in the dedication, to Saint Thomas Aquinas, a dry wit where wits would have used for the rhyme one would.

And which Swift would have used for the rhyme one would.

Phibbs became part of the household. His acceptance was a recipe for disaster, if one bears in mind the comic view of life shown in the Fitzgibbon poems and the seriousness of Graves and Riding. O'Connor, paying them a visit one day, was shaken to find that "the woman poet" disapproved of smoking, and must not be disturbed while working. This subservience seemed to O'Connor astonishing on the part of an atheist and revolutionary whom he thought "possessed by 'saturnic pride'", and it did not last long. Phibbs, suddenly reunited with his wife, went to Rouen.

The two poets and Nicholson followed, urging him to return. Phibbs did so, but only to say that he no longer wanted to be part of the ménage. Riding, according to Wexler, "had come to regard Phibbs as someone who provided serious companionship in terms of her work and who shared her highest values", so that without him she was unable to write. When Phibbs rejected them all finally, she stopped or jumped out of a third floor window. She broke her back, and was unconscious for several days. Phibbs went to see her in hospital, and then destroyed the household for good, by leaving his wife and going off with Nicholson. The couple returned to Ireland, but the Sligo land-owner refused to have Nancy Nicholson in the house. Phibbs in protest changed his name to Taylor, and as Geoffrey Taylor became known as a minor poet of the 1930s, and later as an anthologist, in particular of Ireland. After Riding's recovery—although for some time she limped and had to use a cane—she and Graves went to live in Deya, Majorca.

The departure must have been a conscious break with the past, yet she still felt the need to write about it. The preface to *Poems, a Joking Word* (1930) describes Phibbs (not by name) as "the Devil who was also Judas", and mentions a battle between "truth" and "under-handness" after which "I left that room, by the window of course, and poems came with me. Or rather I went with poems". At about the same time she mentioned Christian names in a prose introduction called "Obsession", although the actual happenings are hidden by a prose that becomes more obscure the longer you look at it.

Laura seeks for "this gift of annihilation to make which I take upon myself the pain of permanence". Robert "reaches for a gift, a gift sought for, a gift not to pleasure". Friends, Len and Jane (Joyce and Gertrude (Stein)) are mentioned. Phibbs appears as "the Nunquam" who "made an accusation of Laura to the police when he thought her dying of fear from a window, and she had opened for her. He said: She was mad, she thought herself God. No. She is mad, she thinks herself Laura".

The meaning of "Obsession", so far as it can be teased out through the tortuous simplicities of the Steinian prose patterns, is that one may have had a moment of revelation from the window, one no longer dependent upon other people but wholly individual. "And Robert, you say, 'He still will not be your greater result, I will not be your to be'. It is suggested—everything here is suggested rather than directly said—that a further reality, a holy or at least superior madness, has been attained through the step or jump. I feared heights, with this same fear by which I was able to leap down a height, and I feared death with the same fear by which I was able to die. And this I did with such ease that you would not, to know me, call me mad. Perhaps you would call me mad, indeed, if you will not call me dead. I do not see how you can help calling me mad." There is a glance at the complexity of being a Jew, but that is rejected in favour of being Laura. ("I have not forgotten Jew but only not for."

What then were right ones? Refusing the list of them which (rightly) she thought a reader might ask for, she offered instead "poems written for all the reasons of poetry" which, if read as they ought to be, would show that "existence in poetry becomes more real than existence in time—more real because more good, more good because more true". Poetry is truth to the self; truth to the self is the good existence.

This conclusion had been reached after a decade of astonishing activity, including the acutely intelligent essays about Poe, T. E. Hulme and others in *Contemporaries* and *Snobs* (1928), the gnomic aphorisms about art in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* of the same year, the futuristic fantasies of *Experiments Are Puzzled* (1930), and the essays and articles in *Epilogue*, the hard-core magazine published from Deya during the Thirties. As early as 1928 she had answered the question "What is a Poem?" with the answer "A poem is nothing", but now her intense enargy was designed to show that a poem was something. It was an expression of ultimate truth, and with the years it became plainer to her that she was a teller of such truths.

The messianic note, perhaps sounded first when she asserted that the fall had been an act of will, was clear by the mid-1930s. Around her in Majorca (Graves in this played a very secondary role) there gathered at different times artists of various talents: Jean Aldrich, Jacob Bronowski, Norman Cameron, Alan Hodge, James Keesee, Honor Wyatt. Such friends were expected to conform to her standards of writing and behaviour, or why were they her friends? Wexler, who is respectful but not reverent, quotes a remark made to James Keesee that "he might be shocked or disgusted, but she felt those who left her left truth", and mentions a warning given to Alan Hodge, who was then writing for *Epilogue*, that he should not submit work to other magazines. It is not surprising that almost all these relationships ended in estrangement. *The World and Outwardness* (1938), a work of breath-taking absurdity, is the climax of her attempt to collect the world's errors by influencing its thinking. She addressed an open letter to friends and acquaintances, inviting them to state their views on the world situation, and printed their replies. Any idea of action to check the Fascism then spreading from one European country to another was altogether ruled out.

Peace does not come before order but after it. Order is not achieved by taking action, but by taking thought. And after expressing her belief in the power of words, she said simply: "If none of this seems practical, I am sorry: it should be so."

If the Riding attitude sounds disbelievably arrogant, that is the impression it often made upon outsiders—two instances upon me, in a single meeting to which Wexler gives more attention than she should. She notes that Riding objected to what I wrote about the meeting on the ground of my "personal animosity" against her—animosity that Riding will in a doubt just as mistakenly find in this article. Seen from the inside view, of course, she was the repository of truths towards which she tried to lead others. But to say that her attitude was arrogant, and often ridiculous? If what I suggest is practical, so much the worse for practicality. It is by no means to say that it was without value as an approach to poetry.

Almost from the beginning she was concerned with the remapping and purification of language. "The human word was taught to look for at school", to use a phrase from one of her letters to me, must be eliminated; or as she put it in an essay on poetry and music, music is an instrument for raising emotions, while poetry is not an instrument and is not written with the intention of arousing emotions—unless of a hybrid music-poetical breed. The searching and witty distinctions she made between poetry and music, painting, dreams, left her saying: "The end of a poem is the poem". It was, and made out of

Tom Disch

Obedient as bombardiers, the ruthless hands
Cover the protesting mouth, deaf
To its reasons. They have always known
Themselves to be, at last, the more
Intelligent. Imagine a mouth
Playing a piano! Or plustering!
No more food, mouth: those are
Orders. Just shut your trap.
If you have something to say, we
Will help you write it.

Mouth exposes a row of chipped enamel
Tilts and hums like an icthab.
The hymn of its maddening desires,
For a little while the hands cling
To the mast. Then with a vast slump
They slide down the long funnel
Into the contented belly of the sea.
Long afterwards a bottle appears at the foot
Of the bed filled with cryptic messages:
We are happy. Come and rescue us. Beware.

nothing by a nobody—made out of a socially non-existent element in language.

Towards this socially non-existent element she worked, gradually removing the luxury-stabs of metaphor and simile, working through delay, tags, rather than distinctions of syntax, through rhythms that became more subtle and less emphatic as she progressed, above all through increasingly simplified repetitions of phrase and oppositions of meaning. What she says is almost always seen freshly, often as it might be seen by an innocent or extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive child. "Because of clothes" begins:

Without dressmakers to connect
The good-will of the body
With the purpose of the head,
We should be two worlds
Instead of a world and its shadow
The flesh.

The poem proceeds through six of these stanzas, with a distinct progression in each. Head is one world and body another, "the divergence being corroded in dress". The thought breeds several reflections. There is an "adorable Christ" in the cloth. Knowledge is one thing, appearance another. The last stanza runs:

Wherefore, by the neutral grace
Of the needle, we possess our triumphs
Together with our defeats
In a single balanced complement:
We pause between sense and foolishness,
And live.

The comparisons are elegantly put yet serious, the poem grows more complex and interesting the more often it is read. No wonder Auden called her "the only living philosophical poet": a remark which she typically derided, saying that "my muse is, presumably, Philosophy, not his Politics". Yet it does not seem wrong or limiting to call "Because of Clothes" a philosophical poem. Like much of the work it proceeds by oppositions between body/head, clothes/nakedness, sense/foolishness. The repeated and slightly varied phrases that she uses elsewhere can be astonishingly effective. "Fine Fellow Son of a Poor Fellow" begins "Every fellow reminds me of my father, and goes on to vary the phrase. Everybody is a poor fellow or a fine fellow, everybody has good or bad luck, although "All luck is luck or perhaps no luck". The poem's rhythm is strongly reminiscent of sounds used by children, and it ends:

A poor fellow and a fine fellow
And bad luck and good luck
And father and son
Are no fellow, no luck, no blood
But a false life-line
Between what is more than poor
And what is less than fine.

"Words" is an excellent introduction to the world and provides a useful brief biography. It should be read along with the *Selected Poems*, issued in 1970 and still in print. She analyses several poems with perception and sympathy. Like the section "John and I" where "I" is the living poet, and "John" the poetic creation, and the poem is designed to combine "her story about John and his tribulations with her own thoughts about the limits of her ability to know another individual". "Words" doesn't, however, comment on the significant changes made between the version in *The Class Chapter* and that in *Collected Poems*. In the first version the poet asks forgiveness if the "poet" upon the strict decrees of death in taking liberties with John/And poetry by making him outlast/himself till now. The later version puts it differently:

If I tottered upon the laws of art
By making John outlast himself till now,

It was to save him from the consequences
Of his generic artfulness and false-ness.
Defection, malice and oblivion.
The laws of art? Could I not alter them?

"I" has become more important, John and his story, and by implication the importance of knowing other individuals, less so. The poem has not been damaged, but it has been changed in accordance with the poet's later attitude.

"John and I" is written in standard iambic pentameter, and is so far untypical. More generally Riding uses, as Roy Fuller has said, a four-beat line, diversified with many different variations (complicated often by repetitions of phrases) but it is often not immediately recognisable. The language used in *The Class Chapter*, for example in the "Samuel" sequence, that was written

reprinted, has a richness and exuberance lacking later on although some poems in this first collection show the strictness that Auden admired and initiated. There are marvellous openings: "The outer mind of passion is through a door, Opening inward." "No more are lovely palaces/And 'Tat-Mat' is old." "His critics, in their thin and early twenties/Pronounced him, fat and ferocious, a wonder-child." And there is, here and in many of the later poems, a playfulness of a fairy-tale kind that does not at all imply a relaxation of intellectual acuity.

"The Quids", for example, is "about" the relationship between atoms and the universe, but the way in which it is written makes it a light and funny poem. Like almost all of the successful work "The Quids" tells a kind of story, offers a narrative progression. The work of the 1930s shows a slow turning away from most of the things that had made her work memorable. The wonderful adroitness and styliness of the long poem on Voltaire which she wrote at the age of twenty, the rewarding density of many early poems, became in her view almost positive vices, certainly dangerous traps. The work of the later 1930s, the "Poems Continual" section in the collected volume, shows—with exception like "Because of Clothes"—quite being drained from the language, slackening of rhythms so that they become nearer prose, almost complete renunciation of rhyme.

She spent out the reasons clearly in the preface to the selection of 1970, in explaining her abandonment of poetry. (Most of the early work has been excluded from this selection.) She had become aware, she says, of a discrepancy between the creed and the craft of poetry that led her to see "the impossibility of anyone's functioning with consistency in the character of poet". By craft she means moral perfection of a kind that she had thought might be reached through poetry, by craft the technical skills of rhythm and rhyme. The poetic motive was sacred, the craft mere technique, a kind of veneer. The work's technical skills seem to be blessed with success because the results appear to be "good" poems, the actual tinkering being concealed under carefully mixed and applied literary polish, a polish giving to the reader our old friend/enemy the luxury of a kind of knowledge, one besides myself and my husband, Schuyler... who has put feet across the margin on the further ground—the margin being the knowledge that truth begins where poetry ends. Or Laura Riding's poetry ends.

The rest of her personal story may be briefly told. Riding and Graves parted, and in 1941 the married Schuyler Jackson, who when poetry editor of *Time* had called her the only living poet able to perform the poet's true function of making sense, made sense. Since her marriage she has called herself Laura (Riding) Jackson, although the reason for this brackets her not apparent. She and Jackson lived in Florida, growing citrus fruit and working on a dictionary that would define the meanings of words, so that they "could be used with perfect truthfulness".

Something of the break-up in the Riding-Graves household, and of later scenes, has been put down by another ex-*Time* hand, T. S. Matthews, who spent a period with them in Majorca, and was by his own account a friend and disciple. Mr. Matthews is not the kind of friend one would choose as an obituarist, but if a quarter of his allegedly malicious and lachrymose account is accurate, it confirms the destructive quality of Laura Riding's personality.

Jackson died in 1969, with *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words* still incomplete. In her latest *Who's Who* entry the book is said to be "incomplete, with publications arrangements pending". In 1972 Laura (Riding) Jackson published *Telling*, a work of impenetrable abstractness about the One and the Many, truth and falsehood, interesting in its confirmation of the style as poet owed to the Bible. Some later notes, and an addendum chiefly about the nature of poetic vision, are valuable for a further understanding of her attitude and development.

At the end one is left not with the creed but the craft, with the poet of original genius spoiled, yet the best of them are extraordinary. The language used in *The Class Chapter*, for example in the "Samuel" sequence, that was written



"A Band of Wind-Players on a Balcony", c. 1540, attributed to Hans Holbein. An illustration to "The Wind Band in England, 1540 to 1840" by Edward Craft-Murray, an article in the *British Museum Yearbook of Music and Civilization* (247pp. British Museum Publications, £16.00/£14.00/£9.00). The ten articles in the Yearbook cover a wide range of subjects; they include the late in Ancient Greece, music and gold-weights of the Asante and musical scenes in Japanese woodblock print.

Serving the imagination

By Colin Macleod

W. B. STANFORD:
Enemies of Poetry
181pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£8.95.
0 7100 0460 5

In this book W. B. Stanford, as a latter-day Sidney or Shelley, does battle with an ample selection of "enemies of poetry", among whom the enemies of Homer are most prominent. The bulk of it is concerned with those, many of them literary scholars, who have tried to defile poetry in the name of history, science, philosophy or morality. If then goes on in lay low no less than the enemies of poetry, it is a classical critic's "I" in particular ways in which poetry can be misread; and he concludes with a blurt of the trumpet proclaiming the "freedom" of the harassed damsel.

Professor Stanford is no Don Quixote: not only is the whole book pervaded by a refreshing love of its subject, but it also scores a good many hits. However, he is himself open to criticism on a number of counts. Some of these may be conveniently dealt with under two headings: (1) whom or what should he be rebutting? (2) how should he conduct his defence?

In the first chapter he writes: "Since my aim is to persuade rather than to provoke I have avoided reference to living scholars." One should appreciate the peaceable spirit of this declaration; but it points to a defect in the book. For example, on pages 27 to 31 he shrewdly criticizes some of the injustices done by "anthropologists" to Homer. But the writings in question appeared in 1907 and 1914. It is true that the notion of Homer as a kind of Moses-cum-Jeeves is not dead; but what have our classical anthropologists been up to since then?

If we are looking for fallacies rather than insights, we might turn to the contemporary interest in myth. One result of this has been the study of say the Cadmus myth ignoring, or mangling, its actual manifestations in literature—which are, moreover, strikingly various—in order to squeeze out its supposed meaning.

Structures and printed page have all their love, and not those things that they are abstract of. (Brian Vickers's *Towards a Greek Tragedy* was a valuable corrective.) A comparable error in Homeric studies, one form of which Stanford does attack, is talking about "the Homeric" rather than the poems. Homer vanishes into the "oral poet", a figure who seems to be

no longer a poet at all, let alone a great one.

Again: to consider Stanford's strictures on scientists. As he himself observes, "scientific factuality is less in fashion". This is surely because science no longer means what it meant a hundred years ago. If modern poetry has often shown up as puzzling and troubling world, so has modern science. The cosmological probabilities, the hot-house flowers of pure mathematics (whose affinities with poetry Stanford briefly discusses) become the latest theory of particles; and if there is scientific progress, it does not seem in an orderly Victorian manner.

The feud between science and poetry is a heritage from the nineteenth century: Keats's "Lamia" was a prophetic work. But as feuds tend to, it has lost its reason for existing; and to see why is more instructive than simply to recall it.

Here Stanford might have spared his sword-arm. But he should have challenged the worse enemies of poetry, very much alive today, those who peddle on its behalf their careful exegesis and subtle judgment. Two examples of their work are in fact quoted with approval by Stanford himself. One is a passage from Oscar Wilde which says no more than "poetry is beyond criticism in tedious and beautiful prose". The other is one of the few blunders in the very fine book, Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Here Auerbach tells us that "the Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no secret meaning". I do not see why secrecy should be a precondition of meaning; and there is no lack of overt teaching in Homer; think of the very summit of the *Iliad*, Achilles's admonition to Priam in Book Twenty-Four. Nor is there any lack of subtlety: Auerbach forgets that *Odyssey* have given licence to tidy-minded scholars (who often cheerfully go on celebrating Homeric poetry rather as he does).

One might also wish that Stanford had broken a lance with some more distinguished or less pedantic scholars than the ones he usually chooses; for to reflect on what is missing in a great man's work is far more rewarding than to rebut the errors of inferior minds. One great Hellenist who drew on both anthropology and psychology was E. R. Dodds. (He was still alive when this book was being written.) What he justly admired *The Greeks and the Irrational* does not bring out is that the irrational, of its very nature, can never be thoroughly understood or controlled, and that earlier Greek literature—epic, tragedy, comedy, history—is a profound and rationally conscious representation

of this fact. The tale begins with the "wrath" of Achilles, a man caught in his own savage or egotistic impulses, and then renouncing them to face the immensity of his death and the emptiness of his life. It is an adequate study of the Greeks and the irrational, as Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* made clear, must include a searching account of their greatest literature; and indeed the difficulties of Homer's rationalist critics often arise because Homer is not himself confused (or interpolated), but represents people acting or suffering in the normal human state of confusion and ignorance.

Stanford, to his credit, is no afraid to say why he believes in poetry; but has he a satisfactory position from which to defend it? The difficulty may be put by considering how far he has answered the greatest of all enemies of poetry, Plato. The nub of Plato's argument was that poetry defiles the mind and saps the conscience; the defender must show that it conveys some truth and does some good. Above all, the truth of poetry Stanford has a colourful collection of things to say: "rather than imitating nature, it is somehow 'trans-forms and creates'; it is a vehicle of transcendent truth"; it represents "a people doing things". I think that all these assertions are essentially true; but if they are to defend poetry, we need to be told just how they can all be true at once.

But more important is that, in a way, Plato is unanswerable. Poetry can always deceive because it helps us to escape certain realities; and it flatters us partly because that is a human need. Is it enough to reply that it is natural to seek the pleasures of art and painless, or worse, to reject them? Likewise, even if the pleasure poetry gives is not necessarily harmful and even if it may sometimes effect a mental "catharsis" (where our house stood) it can foster moral atrophy; and Homer himself showed us what the Sirens could do. Perhaps the best answer to Plato was Shelley's: "The imagination can and should feed an understanding which includes moral consciousness. This is also part of Horace's argument in the *Epistles* and *Iris Murdoch's* in *The Fire and the Sun*; but they are more clearly than Stanford's in Plato's intransigent element in the base defender of poetry is not its advocate, but its critic, though the critic will also be, like Plato, a lover.

But it would be unjust to end a review of this book trying to end where it fails. It is a warm, lively and thoughtful work of willing, full of vivid illustration and anecdote, and it will surely give comfort and pleasure to any who feel the philistine upon them.

MYTHOLOGY

CHARLES KINGSLEY:

The Heroes
Illustrated by H. M. Brock.
224pp. Macmillan, 14.95.
0 333 29058 5

ROGER LANCELYN GREEN:

Heroes of Greece and Troy
334pp. Bodley Head, £4.50.
0 370 0127 0

"Among retellings for young readers", writes Mr Roger Lancelyn Green in the preface to *Heroes of Greece and Troy*, "only *The Heroes* . . . has become a real classic." A nostalgic-sounding reprint of a handsome edition of Kingsley's book, first published in 1928 and adorned with illustrations by H. M. Brock which could hardly be more typical of the children's books of that period, gives one the chance to test the truth of this assertion. I first read *The Heroes* at about the time when this edition first appeared. It made a powerful impression on me; but before rereading my recollections of it were not wholly favourable. I do not greatly care for Christian Socialism and muscular Christianity. I remembered some of his more embarrassing poems, notably "Lorraine, Lorraine, Lorraine", and the absurd episode of his tenure of the Regius Chair of Modern History at Cambridge, well summed up by W. H. Thompson, Master of Trinity, when he remarked after the inaugural lecture of Kingsley's successor: "I had not thought we should regret poor Kingsley so soon." Even before reading Susan Clithy's excellent life of Kingsley, *The Beast and the Monk*, I had been aware of his unhealthy interest in the life of St Elizabeth of Hungary, and in particular in the proclivities which she shared with Swinburne, and had noticed with distaste his curious mixture of sensuality, religiosity and heartiness. I had been irritated by several of his novels, and had relished his discomfiture in the exchange with Newman.

Rereading *The Heroes*, I must acknowledge that my recollection of it has been unjustly coloured, and that Kingsley's merits are more obvious to me now than they were then. I have mentioned, in particular, its must have been affected by my early recollections of *The Water-*

babies, in which the evangelical element is a great deal more obtrusive. In telling the stories of Perseus, the Argonauts and Theseus, Kingsley managed to a great extent to avoid religious moralizing. It is true that the section on the Argonauts starts with a sermon on the wrongness of doing things for money, into which Christ and the Apostles, Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale are irreverently dragged; and the awful warning conveyed by the sad ends of Jason and Theseus is put across in a way that reminds one of the same author's *Hereward the Wake*. But in general Kingsley keeps a tight rein on his Victorian tendency.

Kingsley wrote *The Heroes*, which first appeared in 1856, when he was thirty-seven, because he found Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* to be excessively Gothic. He himself avowed this failing, but he was deeply affected by romanticism, and his influence is always present in his work. The book contains many echoes of the English poets; Mount Casius and the vast Siripontion here are out of Milton, drinking the blood-red wine comes from the blunder of Sir Patrick Spens, and Jason holds Medea "with his glittering eye" after the fashion of the Ancient Mariner. But the most pervasive influence is that of the humane Victorian. "Because you Authorized Version." "Because you have taken your own blood", says the prophet who comes to prophesy against the hard-hearted Acheris: "your own blood shall rise up against you; because you have sinned against your kindred, and have made their blood to be polluted." They fatten at ease, like sheep in the pasture", says Pallas Athene, speaking of "the souls of clay". "And eat what they did not sow, like oxen in the stall." Certain phrases like "jolly merchant kings", the biblical manner leads Kingsley to strike at times an unheroic note.

It is also true that what school-masters used to call the facts of life are less prominent in Kingsley's telling of the legends than in most ancient versions. In his account of Danae and the tower of bronze, the shower of gold is not mentioned and Perseus's paternity is not revealed. Danae's rescuer, Cleus, has a wife already, and is old enough to have reached years of discretion; his wicked brother Polydeuces indeed wishes to marry her, but though he persecutes her (like St Elizabeth, Danae gets heaven) he does not press the point, as he did according to

some ancient authors. Kingsley's account of the voyage of the Argonauts omits the episode of their visit to Lemnos, where, some time before the women had done away with all the men, and of the "love in" to use G. S. Kirk's expression, that took place. Medea's revenge on Jason is alluded to, but the form it took is not specified. We are told that Theseus and his friend Pirithous tried to carry off Persephone, but not that they actually did carry off, well before she had reached the age of consent, the young but promising Helen. Kingsley's reluctance to mention the amours of the gods doubtless led him to suppress a story which, may well alter a reader's attitude to Jason and his relations with his uncle Pelias. In his version Pelias appears as the wicked usurper who has stolen the throne which properly belongs to Jason's father Aeson; and that is how Pindar views the matter. Aeson was the son of the beautiful Tyro by her mortal husband, her uncle Cretheus; Pelias and Neleus were her sons by the god Poseidon. Sophocles in a famous tragedy described how Tyro was ill-treated by her husband's second wife, the brutal Sidero, "the iron woman", who cut off her lovely hair and was finally about to have her murdered when in the nick of time her semi-divine sons made their appearance. When Tyro was ill-treated by her husband's second wife, the brutal Sidero, "the iron woman", who cut off her lovely hair and was finally about to have her murdered when in the nick of time her semi-divine sons made their appearance. When Tyro was ill-treated by her husband's second wife, the brutal Sidero, "the iron woman", who cut off her lovely hair and was finally about to have her murdered when in the nick of time her semi-divine sons made their appearance.

Perhaps partly because of his successful effort to reduce the moralizing element, *The Heroes* is one of Kingsley's best works. It is still a good introduction to the antiquarian of Chaucer's academy, for the sons of heroes. This is how he describes the return of the Argonauts to their starting-point: "And they run the ship ashore; but they had no strength left to haul her up the beach; and they crawled out on the pebbles, and sat down, and wept till they could weep no more. For the houses and the trees were all altered; and all the faces which they saw were strange, and their joy was swallowed up in sorrow while they thought of their youth, and all their labour, and the gallant comrades they had lost." It reminds one of Seferis' poem about Ithaca.

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Who's Who in Bootle

for Philip Gardner

Whoever named the streets where I grew up,
he must have been a simple-minded philanthropist
who wished brave things on Working Men,
or some at-a-loss commission man
who knew a bright librarian.

A grand eccentric pantheon
of poets and of novelists was where I lived,
illustrious names that no-one knew
or some, like Cow-per, mispronounced.

Dryden, Pope, and Akenside,
Prior, Smollett, Bowles, and Keats.
But who the hell was Falconer? And who
were Armstrong, Beattie? Elliot, of course,
was only George. And now I know
who Butler was (where our house stood):
a dandy Lord who wrote of Pompeii's Last Days.
He should have been here for the Blitz.

The curfew tolled at Gray Street School
each nine a.m.; but the Gray was adjacental,
And Norton Street (I suppose the one of "Corbodus"
but where was Sackville?) saw the start
of my romances and cute eventual tragedies
with choirgirls from St Leonard's Church.

It was under a lamp in Prior Street
that poets started muttering, like sex
From a library book my Best Friend read
a wanton and corrupting thing:
"Or . . . through the paddler's bowl/Sailed in the sun."
It sounded wild iambic gongs across grey roofs.
And Tennyson, Walter, Kipling, and Scott,
Moore and Gower, and all the rest,
like Rip Van Winkles rubbed their eyes.

Matt Simpson

Classical tales romantically retold

By Hugh Lloyd-Jones

rushed between those toppling ice-crags and the cold blue lips of death". He does full justice to Theseus' encounter with the Minotaur, his death with an arrow from Trazen to Athens, and to his battle with the Minitaur. He is often excellent in less exciting episodes, as when he describes the somewhat limited conversation of the Crater with the antiquarian of Chaucer's academy, for the sons of heroes. This is how he describes the return of the Argonauts to their starting-point: "And they run the ship ashore; but they had no strength left to haul her up the beach; and they crawled out on the pebbles, and sat down, and wept till they could weep no more. For the houses and the trees were all altered; and all the faces which they saw were strange, and their joy was swallowed up in sorrow while they thought of their youth, and all their labour, and the gallant comrades they had lost." It reminds one of Seferis' poem about Ithaca.

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repellent. But Brock's Sirens are wet, his boy Jason listening to Chiron is soppy, and his wicked lolling the dragon looks like a nice young lady in a peasant at Garçon.

Roger Lancelyn Green's *Heroes of Greece and Troy* has held its own since its first appearance in 1958, and it is interesting to contrast it with Kingsley. It covers a much more extensive field, including all the main Greek myths except the Trojan, which are woven into a loose continuous narrative after the fashion of Apollodorus.

Mr Lancelyn Green wrote a thesis about Andrew Lang, and seems to hanker a little after the *fin de siècle*. Among the poets who supply quotations placed at the head of chapters are Long himself, Lord de Tabley and Maurice Hewlett; Pindar and Nonnus are rendered by him into a manner markedly different from their own. But Mr Lancelyn Green's prose reveals very little of the ornateness which we associate with that period; on the whole his is a plain style, characteristic of the twentieth century. He has a great deal of ground to cover, and sometimes he becomes hurried and consequently scrappy, as when he writes: "But when Orestes, urged on to the deed by Electra, killed Clytemnestra also, the Mycenaeans were not so keen to have him". But on the whole he writes clearly and pleasantly, though he lacks Kingsley's poetical colouring. On occasion there is a touch of wit; thus when the Teumessian fox is pursued by Amphitryon's matchless hound, he adapts Wilde and writes "the uncatchable" was being chased by the inescapable."

Mr Lancelyn Green knows and has used a considerable amount of the Greek and Roman poetry. Sometimes he follows a source closely, and he is at his best on such occasions. In telling how the new-born Hermes tricked Apollo, he makes

Angus Wilson SETTING THE WORLD ON FIRE

"A very distinguished novel . . . It is superb entertainment and social criticism but it is also a poem about the life of human beings — a moving and disturbing book and a very superior piece of art."

Anthony Burgess, *Observer*

"Wonderfully intricate and haunting new novel . . . The complex relationships between art and reality . . . are explored with a mixture of elegance, panache and concern that is peculiarly his . . . magnificent."

Margaret Drabble, *Listener*

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Secker & Warburg

commentary

The moving finger

By Alan Bell

The Universal Penman
Victoria and Albert Museum

"The Universal Penman", the very attractively displayed new exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (July 2-September 28), is a wide-ranging display mounted by Joyce Irene Whitley and Vera Kaden to provide a survey of western calligraphy from Roman times to the present day. Because of the force of the Italian revival, visitors will no doubt concentrate on the humanistic and later manuscripts, but the earliest documents on show should not be neglected. The exhibition as a whole is a tribute to the enduring qualities of the Roman hand, and even more might have been made of the sample funerary inscription with which the display opens, as the ancestor of practically every other exhibit.

The Victoria and Albert's own holdings have been supplemented by loans from the British Library and the Bodleian to give a representative coverage of early scripts, and the medieval sections of the comprehensive exhibition catalogue (£7.50) have been covered in extra detail to make up for the absence of a published catalogue of the Victoria and Albert's own medieval manuscripts. (Let us hope that the success of this exhibition may lead to the revision and publication of the typescript catalogue summarized in the first volume of Neil Ker's *Medieval Libraries*.) There are fine things to be found there, many not generally known, and many of the later medieval manuscripts are the more important for having been assembled during the deputy-keeper-ship of James Wardrop. He is himself represented in the exhibition, as curator, scholar and practitioner, by the happy conjunction of one of his own palaeographical notebooks, written with unconscious perfection, next to its very model, the

Publius Victor that was owned successively by Edward Johnston and Wardrop before coming to the Museum. Johnston published some examples from it in his *Writing and Illuminating, and Lettering*, which from 1906 has been the basic textbook of the calligraphic revival, and this manuscript well deserves its place in the modern section.

One of Wardrop's many discoveries was the identification of the scribe Bartolomeo Savito, whose hand may have influenced the Italian types of Aldus Manutius. A particular strength of this exhibition is the constant interplay it shows between the calligraphic and the typographic. The Savito Cicero of 1495 is a model of lightness and grace, its dignity coupled with a charming informality of mis-en-page that reveals a sure individual taste. A manuscript of some sixty years later—Regulations for St Mark's, Venice—is technically very accomplished, but over-regularized in layout and better formation through imitation of the printed page. Type followed script in the Savito example, but in the Venetian manuscript the process is reversed, with a noticeable aesthetic loss.

The interplay continues in the great period of the writing-masters' engraved sample-books, from the most famous British example of which, George Bickham's *Universal Penman* (1733-41), the exhibition takes its name. In these highly accomplished (but often not adequately legible) specimens, the pen is matched against the graver, and technical virtuosity in calligraphic clarity of letter-formation is often more prized than clarity of letter-formation. Thick and thin strokes become exaggerated as if for the benefit of the copper-plate maker and script more suited to inscriptional work on metal become common. The V and material is well provided with British and continental examples of the exhibits coming from the collection of Sir Ambrose Heal, whose *English Writing-Masters*

and their Copy-Books (1931) takes the story up to 1800. Thereafter the study is artistically a dull one until William Morris, Edward Johnston and others can be seen going back to the basic sources and reviving the art by historical example. Nevertheless the history of English handwriting in this period still needs to be investigated, the manuals for clerks and school children rehearsed and analyzed in the way Ray Nash has covered the American writing-books of the period. These clerical traditions were—and are—tenacious, but they should not be entirely neglected in the light of the more obvious attractiveness of the Italian revival and its products—themselves still deserving even fuller study. A well-selected display on the historical study of calligraphy shows further opportunities as well as the achievements of recent years.

Pride of place in the modern sections goes, of course, to the many practitioners whose work has been acquired by the Museum in recent years. Some specimens are already famous, such as Edward Johnston's *Book of Sample Scripts*, which was published in facsimile in 1966, but nearly all have a vigour and individuality to confound ill-informed critics who quite mistakenly see a dulling similarity in the hands. Sometimes the illumination is disappointing—in conception rather than in execution—when compared with the scripts, although a traditional rustic demureness quite many of the literary passages chosen. The excitement in the work of calligraphers with typographical exhibition provides much visual pleasure, showing the two calligraphers complementing each other for complementary reasons. The traditional variety of the art and its capability of adaptation for the future are very well shown in a large, intricate and witty "calligraphic sampler" which the Museum commissioned from Ann Fleckle especially for the memorable exhibition.



One of the exhibits from "The Universal Penman", reviewed by Alan Bell on this page. The design comes from the manuscript of an anonymous seventeenth-century writer, and is based on a similar design in the writing book of Pedro Diaz Morante (1565-1620). The catalogue to the exhibition, *The Universal Penman: A Survey of Western Calligraphy from the Roman Period to 1980* (15.50p 0 11 200119 8) is available from HARTS bookshops at £7.50.

Quiet miracles

By George Szirtes

The Way of a World: The Graphic Work and Poetry of Charles Tomlinson
The Arncliffe Gallery, Bristol

Having been up and down the country as the Arts Council's touring exhibition of Charles Tomlinson's graphics is temporary, moving westwards and has reached Tomlinson's own present home town. It has got there in a slightly pruned form, as restrictions of space have necessitated the exclusion of some of the poems (those of the graphics are missing), and it travels without a catalogue, which makes the numbering of the exhibits seem rather arbitrary.

But chance plays an important part in the creation of the pictures themselves through the use of the decalcomania technique. This is a sophisticated use of the Rorschach blot, whereby wet ink or paint is squeezed between two relatively unabsorbent surfaces creating a pattern that is then interpreted by the viewer. The term "decalcomania" was coined by the Surrealists and employed by Ernst and Dominguez particularly to describe how they improvised upon the given blot to account its suggestions of figurative imagery. Before them, Arp had experimented with chance configurations by allowing cut shapes to fall where they pleased, and it was well known that Leonardo had used the technique to discover the shape of the face of an irrational person.

The ambiguity of form has always been fascinating to Tomlinson. In *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, James Hogg describes the "horrific" face of a man, "the face of an irrational person."

seen in low cloud. In the Tomlinson exhibition there is a picture of a blot that looks like a cloud that looks like a face. In order to draw this much particularity from the original shape he often resorts to scissors, or conscious use of the brush, to transpose or enhance effects, reaching, as he says, "with and against the decalcomania." What the technique does outstandingly, especially in the monochrome Tomlinson, usually restricts himself to suggest volume and texture, most typically of rock, water or cloud. But cut to the right, it may suggest bone as in "Prehistoric Masks" (that is, cut to skull shapes) or foliage or feathers as desired. Smaller, more compact shapes must be made by

further cutting and collage. In the picture accompanying the poem "Aesthetic" a mountain sprays delicately into air, like sea-water. In the Four Elements birds and sea-weed perform Isadora Duncan dances. The ambiguity can only be half-controlled. Who is to say that the "figures" do not include a flasher engaging the attention of a nun while an anxious Queen Victoria thunders up the beach? A ready-made piece of imagery, a tiny couch-and-fog, hidden in this particular picture.

The pictures do illuminate the poems and throw them into fresh relief. The clarity of the verse (and this is not the place to deal

with those) open up to greater humour or threat as if by theatrical under-lighting. But it is a theatre of quiet miracles. Tomlinson admires Cézanne's "complete absence of self-regard" and hopes, by means of the chance-based origins of his images to defuse the artistic difficulty of Concept, simply seizing on a given idea. Sometimes, as with the various early Masks—the Wolf Mask is a particularly striking example—the material is not merely seized but seriously unhandled, while at other times the artist's discovery of a detail that looks like a convincing snapshot of natural landscape phrases us with formal and atmospheric elegance, and a sneaking "well-funny-that-looks-so-like" feeling. These are the

phantasms of a very intelligent and fastidious man. They are moving west to Wales next, but after shooting up to Durham and down to Kent they will finally come to rest, surprisingly for the first time, in London, at the Swiss Cottage Library from January 3 to 31 next year.

A four-week season of the film of Jean-Luc Godard opens at the Camden Place, 211 Camden High Street, London NW1, on July 24. The films showing are *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, *Alphaville*, *Pierrot le Fou* and *A Bout de Souffle*.

THE

Review

John

In 1832 the US Congress passed a bill to establish a national library. The bill was passed by a vote of 100 to 90. The bill was passed by a vote of 100 to 90. The bill was passed by a vote of 100 to 90.

CHICAGO

The University of Chicago Press
125 Buckingham Palace Road, London

TLS Children's books

The fortunes of Mantlemass

By Margaret Meek

With the publication of *A Flight of Swans* comes the Kestrel uniform edition of the Mantlemass novels—seven of them—representing a remarkable, unique, achievement. It is the appropriate time to look at the series as a whole, and to relate the skill of the author to the accumulation of satisfactions that come to a reader who reads them in the chronological order of events, from 1486 to the Civil War, associated with the rise and fall of the house called Mantlemass: *The Lark and the Laurel* (1970), *The Spirit of Broom* (1971), *A Cold Wind Blowing* (1972), *The Eldest Son* (1977), *The Iron Lily* (1978), *A Flight of Swans* (1980), *Harrow and Harvest* (1974). The two written most recently fill out gaps in earlier episodes without changing the structure of the sequence. *The Miller's Boy* (1976) has not been included. A generation of readers has become familiar with the world Barbara Willard has made in these books. One I know read the first at the age of ten, and the last within a month of becoming eighteen with undiminished pleasure. Yet the historical novel has now neither the popularity nor the prestige it once enjoyed, so we may ask ourselves, what do these books highlight in current writing for the young?

First, the cycle of the tales themselves. Two families, Malles and Medleys, whose fortunes and breedings intermingle, have their centre within the Wealden area of Sussex. They are manorial folk, who, for the most part, go about their business as horsebreeders, foresters and ironfounders. They won and wed, hear children and die. The interlocking lives of mistress and master, servant and workman, parent and child are limited to a rural economy and mutual dependence within the forest pale. The house, with its attached manor and foundations, is a bustling place from first to last. In each book we see three generations at a time, so that when the lives of the characters are touched by ripples of events in the outside world.

Sometimes the concerns are domestic: a boy whose father never married his mother has to confirm his lineage if he is to marry with the family of Malles; a rash decision by an eldest son destroys a whole strain of fine horses and ruins a house in the ground; other times, political events, such as the heart of the community; under the Tudors, children are marriage pawns in a struggle for power; a father-in-law languishes in prison for his faith; a nun made homeless by the Dissolution marries young Peter Medley with sombre consequences for both.

And threading its way from book to book is the transmitted secret of that nobler strain that joins the families to the blood royal in Richard Plantagenet, whose crooked shoulder appears in both men and woman, and whose dagger and signet ring are all that remain after the holocaust. It is a richly varied tapestry of vivid characters and social change; the texture is woven from the cumulative detail that the time span makes possible. Each

volume has its own harmony, its own significance, and at the same time reverberates through the others, creating a kind of memory for the reader, who, like the author, lives within the pastoral illusion.

The new book, *A Flight of Swans*, takes up the story at a time of the Armada. Ursula Medley, the daughter of Lilies, the iron master, has married Robin at the height of a romantic love affair. Now, with her children ailing, her marriage turning sour and her mother a shadow of her former self, Ursula undertakes the care of Sir Francis Jollard's second son, Roger, when his brother Humphrey disappears after riding to the coast to watch the great sea battle. Five years later, when Roger has become iron master, his brother reappears as a Spaniard, and puts Roger into a confusion of loyalties that ends with his leaving Mantlemass.

Ursula, finding a late, required, but impossible love in Roger's father, is the next guardian of the secret when Piers Medley dies. It is an autumnal book, slightly melancholy in its wisdom, getting that obligations of duty and trust exert judgments and choices that run counter to self-gratification, and that love "is a great inducement of strong purpose." The author is too astute an artist to be seduced by the conventional comfort of the happy ending here or finally. The more the reader comes to feel one of the family, the more Mantlemass assumes an air of immutability denied to other people and things, the more certain it is of its foundations in a local, real world. The last young hero, Edmund, in *Harrow and Harvest*, dies as the result of an act of gratuitous cruelty. As historical novels, these books wear their rue with a difference.

The characters are the heart of the matter. They are not cast in the heroic mould of Rosemary Sutcliffe's heroes. Instead their very frailty makes them human, rounded, with a flesh and blood actuality but makes a mock of conventional notions of "realism" in novels. The brothers Henry, Piers and Richard have both family likeness and searching singularity. Each is fated to do less than succeed in all he tries.

They are memorable not for their deeds but for ways of walking and riding, their speech, their flashes of insight and their different ways of enduring what cannot be changed. Henry, having made his bad horse bargain, has to see his child die. Piers, the most perceptive and tenacious, curses the boy he adopted to redeem his father. The stories team with people. They jostle each other in the round of seasonal work and festivities. Even those whose parts are significant but minor are fully rounded. One remembers the

blazing blue eye of Timothy Morpheus, the Ades who care for the horses, Lady Mary Sidney with smallpox, the backward mothered Jamie with his share of cunning and his pathetic and dangerous mother, Dorrian, who "had been beautiful and was still not old".

The strongest characters are undeniably the women, and this in a period which seemed to offer them only dependent roles. Dame Elizabeth in the first book establishes the Mantlemass fortune and makes a woman of Cecily who becomes a legend in her turn. Catherine insists on choosing her husband where her heart is.

Ursula holds the family together when its fate is doubtful, and finally Cecilia rejects the New World and stays in the ruins with the prospect of a different kind of rebuilding. They are a formidable tribe, expecting no pity or excuses, tender and loving, and much more clear-sighted than the men. Above them all towers Lilies, a master of iron, more than a mistress of men, more than a mistress of men. When the forest men reject the Welsh workers who have come to the family, Lilies has to deal with an industrial dispute:

"Which is the leader?" Piers asked the foreman, speaking for the first time. "Where do you come from, then?" he asked, when they stepped out from the rest. "Not from any part of the Wealden country, I'd say."

"From Spain!" someone yelled out—and another threw a stone. It fell short, but it was the man jump; and raised a tear and the crowd was hounded by its own solidarity.

"Be silent!" said Master Piers, bringing it out, not shouting, but throwing it at them as surely as

if he were tossing back the stone. "Tell them where you're from, man. Let them hear." From Wales, sir. From the valleys there. But we follow the iron sir—all of us here, working and working across from west to east. By the forest of Dean, and then on. Sometimes to mine the ore, and sometimes to tend the furnaces. Go into Kent, they told us, as the far side of England. So we moved on, and long before Kent we found places. And so now we are here.

"Did he tell you this?" Richard asked Lilies. "Aye. And I told the rest. And none ever doubted it. I had only four men come to me off the forest—just four. If four can work for me, then so may forty. And so it goes, all day, every day," she cried, her voice rising. "I'll take what labour came to me, and we'll be good founders as Sirives as any place. So be damned to you that won't take what's offered and then come to deny it others! Be damned to the lot of you, I say. To the devil with you! Runst in hell, the lazy, sullen lump of you, for all I'll care!"

This was man's talk and it filled Ursula with an emotion that was half pride and half shame. What would the Mantlemass ladies say to such round swearing and shouting?

Everyone knows that dialogue is the historical novelist's trap and each author devises her own conventions. Barbara Willard has made a masterpiece of a local, real world, and raised a tear and the crowd was hounded by its own solidarity.

"Be silent!" said Master Piers, bringing it out, not shouting, but throwing it at them as surely as



One of Doreen Caldwell's drawings from Mary Stewart's *A Walk in Wolf Wood*, reviewed on page 806.

don, says she "would live peacefully in the countryside and speak how she chose—saying miffed and mauling, stonch, and as often as ever she thought the world."

Now set these books alongside some of our current novels for the young. We are fixated about contemporary problems and concerns; no bad thing when one remembers the state of unruliness that the dozen of historical novelists, Geoffrey Trevelyan set out to remedy in 1938. But in writing authors, those that are bidable, to depict psychological and social reality, especially of adolescence, on the grounds of relevance to the concerns of readers, we concentrate on surfaces and deflect authors from deeper issues of form and content.

From my reading of the Mantlemass novels I would argue that the author's involvement in her characters lets us see our present state all the more clearly just because the world she makes is distanced from our own. Then, no less than now, ordinary people were pawns in the games of power. Folk in the next village aroused passions we reserve for foreigners. To hold a belief against the way of the world brought hideous death we no longer even contemplate.

Labour was a function of the body in ways we now reserve for spirit. Women were nervous not in disguise or as tokens, but in their own right. There is no theme current in books for the young that does not have its counterpart here. The significant difference is that in the Mantlemass novels the question of what the self owes to the self and what to the rest of the world is always answered in terms of social responsibility. In the same way, memories are important as inspiration for present endurance and future action. The historical sense, so clearly absent from much of what the young now read, emerges as a powerful agent of regeneration. If writing and reading are metaphorical for living, Barbara Willard offers an image of our continuing condition as powerful as anything I have read for some time.

There is no reason why only the young should read the Mantlemass books. But to those who are learning to discern the satisfactions of form as well as content, this extended novel, a symbol of historical, political, personal and seasonal time, offers an extension of their literary competence. As the books follow each other, the readers grow, so that when the end comes, and the writer faces the inevitable detachment from what she has created, the reader understands the true sense of an ending. It is no mean feat to bring that about.

BARBARA WILLARD: *The Lark and the Laurel* (0 7226 5852 4), *The Spirit of Broom* (0 7226 5854 0), *A Cold Wind Blowing* (0 7226 5855 9), *The Eldest Son* (0 7226 5257 7), *The Iron Lily* (0 7226 6040 5), *Harrow and Harvest* (0 7226 6011 0), *A Flight of Swans* (0 7226 5438 3), Kestrel, £4.50 each.

SUMMER STORIES TO SHOUT ABOUT

EVE RICE
Once in a Wood
Ten Tales from Aesop
ILLUSTRATED IN COLOUR
BY THE AUTHOR
370 30318 0 £3-25

BETSY BYARS
The Night Swimmers
370 30317 2 £3-25



AIDAN CHAMBERS
Seal Secret
370 30298 6 £3-25

NORMAN HUNTER
Sneeze and Be Slain
and Other Incredible Stories
ILLUSTRATED BY
BABETTE COLE
370 30313 X £3-50

FROM THE BODLEY HEAD

Feminist folk tales

By Brigid Brophy

ALISON LURIE:
Clever Gretchen and other folk
tales for children
Illustrated by Margaret Tomes
Hutchinson, £3.50.
Hb 434 5489 3

It is evening at a lonely inn. An unknown woman arrives and asks for supper. The rest of the inn's staff goes up to bed, leaving a servant girl to wait on the guest. At the guest's suggestion, the girl lies down beside the fire, but she only feels sleep, because she already suspects the woman of being a man in disguise. When all is quiet, the guest does indeed get off his disguise. The servant girl watches in terror as he then takes out of his luggage a severed human hand. This he sets upright on the table. He lights the ends of his fingers, which "burn like candles". He recites a spell that binds the sleeping household to remain asleep and then lets a gang of criminals into the inn.

I would as soon give a child a ticket for *Psycho* as a collection of such tales. Alison Lurie, however, has no scruples on that account. Here are confined to and concentrated on a single point. "The Hand of Glory" is in her view just the job for children because the "adventure" in it is experienced (or suffered) by a girl.

Her thesis, which she states in her introduction in a mixture of pop and babytalk, is that, in the best known folk tales, it is only the heroes who "get to" have adventures. "As for the heroines," she says, "things just happen to them." This imbalance, she claims, has made some people say that modern children ought not to read fairy tales, because they will get the idea that girls are supposed to be beautiful and good and helpless and dull.

At that point it occurred to me that perhaps modern children ought not to read Ms Lurie's introduction but they get the idea that the way to link four adults with three "ands". I am confident, however, that most children know the normal construction as well as Ms Lurie does.

Next I framed the hope that Ms Lurie would resist the threat to children's freedom to choose their own reading that she attributes to "some people". As a matter of fact, I neither was nor have nor have I known a child for whom being forbidden fairy tales would count as much loss. Still, admirations of censorship are admirations of censorship, and I looked to Ms Lurie to stand up to them. Not she. Cerebrally capitulating, she has produced a volume of fifteen "retold" stories calculated to give no offence to the would-be censors since their heroines are, broadly, resourceful or simply lucky-like, indeed, the servant girl at the inn who finds that breath, water and beer are powerful to extinguish the supernatural flames and then chances to get a jug of milk, which magically does the trick.

In her introduction Ms Lurie

states as fact what can only be her conjecture, namely that stories in which the heroines are passive (or actually supine as I suppose you could call Sleeping Beauty) were the first. I wonder if some scholars of the genre have not already given her sources the makes it hard to accept that cause was followed by effect quite so straightforwardly as she asserts. Thirteen of her stories are taken from nineteenth-century collections, albeit more scholarly than popular, and the editors of ten of those were remaining indecipherable behind volumes of *Folklore* (the 1890s).

If Ms Lurie truly believes that children read fairy tales as normative texts and are liable to "get" the message, then the notion that she inspired her own collection must be open to reproach. A reader of the type she seems to expect would conclude from the majority of her chosen stories that the world is "supposed to" be divided into absolute rulers and pawns or very rich and very poor. From her title story he would learn that nice young men are "supposed to" go about shooting at wild animals, from several of the others that there is something deeply odd, for good or

ill, about old women, especially poor ones, and from yet others that birds are "supposed to" sing—and fish, squirrels and mice to talk—in human language.

Happily, I feel on moral compulsion to counter Ms Lurie's selection of my own list for socialists, vegetarians, social workers or old-age pensioners and students of and about the elderly. I wish I could persuade adults to stop thrusting fairy tales of any kind (except *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Weber's *Shonon*) on children. Ms Lurie's thin volume is as tight-packed as any of the more conventional collections with items that the least psychanalytically eye will naturally read as representations of infantile anxiety about sex: riddles like the Riddle of the Sphinx, incarnate the puzzle about the facts and have to be solved on pain of serious penalty; blatant castration symbols like the comb-like severed hand; and narratives that play on castration dread. One of Ms Lurie's heroines is told to look after her baby brother, but he is snatched away by black geese and she has to brave a witch to recover him.

I am too invertebrate a Freudian to want to dispute that fairy tales are disturbers of children's peace of mind precisely because their content chimes with the content of children's minds. Indeed, fairy tales set in an unlocated past, much as estate agents advertise a "period residence" without specifying

which period; it is the *temps passé* of Charles Perrault's influential collection of 1697, *Histoires du Temps Passé*, and the time of "once upon a time" (the words with which Ms Lurie, a traditionalist, opens the first of her retold tales); and I take it to be a psychological metaphor of childhood itself. Still, there are no adults as well as the "modern children" Ms Lurie mentions. They may prefer to ally fears, rather than to ally them, and to provide actual answers to the questions behind the riddles. There is no need to infuse the freedom of any child who enjoys hearing his own anxieties amplified through fairy tales, but adults who are not simply exercising vengeance for the terrors of their own childhoods may well decide not to insist on passing on these often gruesome little anecdotes to a further generation.

If children are to be frightened, let it at least be by a child and high school: if not, quite. *Psycho*, then, Disney's *Scary Witch*, which cannot be far behind in scaringness. Ms Lurie's narrative manner is very low school. (Incidentally, although the book is published in Britain, the spelling is North American.) The illustrations, by Margaret Tomes, are in black and white and a style that could be called styleless grotesque. Occasionally a distant and misunderstood memory of Mervyn Peake seems to be superimposed on the detailed sub-naturalism that push publishers

will consider suitable for children. (The same used to be thought of lupine puddings.) The front and back covers are (dimly) in colour and even more aggressively with one could conceive half-timbered, thatched, bulging out of true and Each is associated with one of the lovely old women the text has in it for. One house stands in a forest, the other in a cobwebbed street, enough to tap a message of anxiety on the public. The latest one is a fact a mobile home, but to suggest from suburban coziness. It flows large and hideously clogged bird's feet.

Stylistically, the jacket makes a fine match to Ms Lurie's half-timbered prose, which, perhaps thanks to some confusion between folk stories and the *Arden* version, begins many sentences with "And" or "But" or "Now" and spangles its banality with archaic. He put his arms round Janet and kissed her, and laid her on the grass, and she did not say him up. Summer passed, and autumn came, the leaves fell from the trees and Janet was with child. Her father saw how it was with her. . . . Clearly, "retold" means "repeated" and "modern" means "modern". May Ms Lurie's book be pressed on many of us decade's children (or fear they are) as the leaves fall repeatedly (as the trees) into next decade's users saying or not saying one or other way.

Winning pictures and moral tales

By Joy Chant

Before getting on to the gold, silver and bronze awards for the best picture books in this bunch, I want to look at something more perilous—honorary, perhaps? The book is *Not Now, Bernard*. The pictures are as vivid and vigorous as any David McKee has produced; it is the story that worried me. Not Now, Bernard is the answer this little boy gets whenever he speaks to his parents, who throughout the book never look at him: even the information that there is a monster in the garden waiting to eat him is insufficient to make his mother vary her response, or even turn round. The only one to take notice of Bernard is the monster, who eats him. After this he attempts to terrify Bernard's parents, but gets only that bored "Not now, Bernard". In fact he goes to bed without having his imposture noticed. The last page shows him, much disconcerted, saying "But a monster!" while mother, reaching in to turn off the light, replies "You've guessed it. A moral tale for parents certainly; but the possible effect on a sensitive child cannot be known any sensitive children for my guinea-pigs were obstinately undisturbed.

On to the gold: only three. My own favourite was *We Hide, You*

Seek. I cannot remember any book by Aruquo which did not delight me: this is one of the all-but-wordless ones. A very conspicuous little red rhino plays hide-and-seek in a variety of habitats with numerous masters of camouflage; motionless birds and beasts almost vanish into their background, and he only flushes them from cover by a series of accidents, like stepping on the tail of an invisible lizard. Then leafy branches are revealed as flocks of birds, rocks as dikkids, and (my favourite) a stem of flowers as a cluster of butterflies.

The *Labels A Treeful of Pigs* tells of the shifts of a farmer's wife, trying to make her husband get out of bed and help her care for their pigs. A lot of fun is had before she succeeds. The story has the repetition and the touch of slapstick to please a young audience; the pictures, which have the suggestion of a Middle European setting, are gay and energetic; and the dog's happy to explain what seems strange. The text is adequate, but the green, misty, half-enchanted drawings make the book. Not perhaps for a majority, but worthwhile. *Door to Door* (the only one of this kind with no moral) leads us along a street, showing first the outside of the houses, then the inside, and the lives that go on in them.

On to the baser metal; not to be damned, but only faintly praised. Some, like *The Bogart and The Sea*

side Christmas Tree are slight in both story and pictures, but have illustrations unexcelled by the text. *Sara's giant and the upside-down house* is frankly a silly story, however enjoyable the pictures, and *Green Finger House* has a rather tedious tale (poor milliged Aunt Stubbs) linked to some lovely art. I liked particularly the use of borders. *The Tiger Who Lost His Stripes* is an enjoyable story with some good lines ("You're as noisy as a motorbike. . . There aren't any motorbikes in the jungle. . .") but the pictures are rather watery, not up to standard. Finally there is *A Piece of Parkin*, a story about Frances Hodgson Burnett with good execution and impeccable pictures, just not, I feel, with much child-appeal.

JOSE ARRUQUO AND ARIANE DREWY: *We Hide, You Seek*. Julia MacRae Books, £3.75. 0 86203 009 9.

RUTH CRAFT: *Carrie Hepple's Garden*. Illustrated by Irene Hoss. Collins, £4.95. 0 00 183709 5.

JOHN CUNIFFE: *Sara's Giant and the Upside-Down House*. Illustrated.

by Hilary Athabones. André Deutsch, £4.25. 0 233 97202 1.

SARAH GARLAND: *The Seaside Christmas Tree*. Bodley Head, £3.95. 0 370 30290 7.

ROSEMARY HARRIS: *Green Finger House*. Bodley Head, £2.95. 0 370 30290 7.

ANNE LOWE: *A Treeful of Pigs*. Illustrated by Anita Lobel. Julia MacRae Books, £3.50. 0 86203 007 2.

JOHN VERNON LUM: *And The Tiger Who Lost His Stripes*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. Andersen Press, £2.95. 0 505478 7 1.

DAVID MCPHAIL: *The Magical Drawings of Moony B. Finch*. André Deutsch, £3.25. 0 233 97204 8.

ANTHONY PAIR: *The Tiger Who Lost His Stripes*. Illustrated by Michael Foreman. Andersen Press, £3.50. 0 905478 73 8.

MAUREEN ROFLYNE and LEONARD LOUIS: *Door to Door*. Bodley Head, £3.95. 0 370 30259 5.

WILLIAM STEIG: *Caleb and Kate*. Hamish Hamilton, £4.95. 0 21 1003 8.

EMMA TENNANT: *The Bogart*. Illustrated by Mary Ryan. Granada, £3.95. 0 246 11247 7.

ANN TUIWATTE: *A Piece of Parkin*. Illustrated by Glynis Auland. André Deutsch, £4.90. 0 233 97114 5.

Simply enticing

By Judith Elkin

STEVEN KELLOGG:
The Mystery of the Missing Red Mitten
Bodley Head, £3.75. 0 370 30181 1

The Mystery of the Magic Green Ball
Bodley Head, £1.95 each.

BETSY BYANS:
Go and Hush the Baby
Illustrated by Emily A. McCully
Bodley Head, £1.95.
0 370 30306 7

There is still a dearth of good picture story books aimed at children just learning to read for themselves. What is required, at this particular stage, is interesting and enjoyable stories at a suitable emotional level for the young child, with simple language and sentence structures and illustrations, all combining together to entice the child to read. This need not be a recipe for the unimaginatively dull, stilted and humorless books which so often appear in full in this category.

Here are three books of American origin, which, in varying degrees do contain that extra something which may kindle a response. Steven Kellogg has illustrated a number of delightful and original picture books in recent years, such as *Margaret Malt's "The Boy Who Was Followed Home"* and *"Won't Somebody Play With Me?"*. His simple caricatures of people and animals combine ingenuity and wit with a feeling for the ridiculous that appeals to the imagination of many young children. His latest

offerings are two delightful mystery stories aimed at children just learning to read. The books are slightly more than most of his earlier ones but still retain the same sense of fun and appeal to young children. The stories are simple with short sentences leaving much of the detail and humour to the clear black and white illustrations.

In *The Mystery of the Missing Red Mitten*, a small girl loses her mitten (the only item in colour in the whole book). As she searches for it in the snow with her dog, her imagination runs riot: will it sprout into a mitten tree or be used by a hawk to keep his baby's head warm?

At a slightly more advanced level, the companion story is *The Mystery of the Magic Green Ball* in which Timmy loses his favourite green ball in the woods. At first the children (except Sara Blanco who is too busy with her magic set) help to search for it, but in vain. But one day, the children visit the local neighbourhood carnival and visit the mystery kiosk for one thing or another. Sara Blanco is going to marry a two-thousand pound porcupine and Josey Wiggin is to be president of the moon, are added by a familiar-looking (green) magic ball. Can this be the magic Sara Blanco used to find both books. Steven Kellogg's fully blends tale and illustration to make a very pleasing and humorous whole.

Betsy Byans is better known as a novelist for older children. But in her first picture book, *Go and Hush the Baby*, she manages to capture the frustrations of an older child who has come with keeping the baby quiet while mother is otherwise occupied. A simple idea, imaginatively executed and illustrated with pleasant minor illustrations, by Emily A. McCully, which endearingly complement the story. Told partly in verse, it reads aloud well.

Trends in Swedish fiction

By Kicki Moxon Browne

The mainstay of children's fiction in Sweden is stories about ordinary children doing ordinary things. Realism became the fashion in the early 1960s, and it is now widespread in books for every age, from picture books about everyday activities for the very young to the many teenage novels about friendship and love.

There are now not many taboos, least of all sexual. Sexually explicit language and illustrations are not out of the way in stories for quite young children. In novels for older children one may find very detailed descriptions of sexual activity. This is in no way underground literature. For example Hans-Eric Hellberg, a highly respected children's author, has written erotic books specifically designed to arouse the sexual feelings of eleven and twelve year olds. Any taboo against the mention of death in children's books has also disappeared.

Children's lists teem with new titles about individual children coping with the death of grandparents, or parents, or young friends. Another trend is an interest in stories about "outsiders" of all kinds. Many recent titles deal with physically or mentally handicapped children, those whose parents are social outcasts, plain eccentricities, and, especially, immigrant children.

Although realism dominates the field, there is also a strong undercurrent of romanticism and nostalgia, which has become more

marked in the last couple of years. This particularly involves nineteenth and early twentieth-century artists such as John Bauer or Carl Larsson. The picture books of Elsa Beskow, most of which were published early in this century, have always been extremely popular, and there has recently been a flood of reprints. There are also growing numbers of new Swedish authors who are abandoning realism for fantasy, represented in translation in this country by, for example, Sven Christopher Wahlberg, who writes about the occult, and Solveig Hiltner, who writes traditional fairy tales.

Quite separate from any trend is the dominant figure of Swedish children's literature, Astrid Lindgren. Her first book, *Pippi Longstocking*, came out in 1945 amid a sea of blood-chilling books. The anarchic Pippi initially caused some alarm among parents and librarians, but nevertheless Lindgren was immediately recognized as a major new children's author. Her writing has influenced all subsequent writing for children in Sweden. Lindgren was perhaps the first to identify with, rather than talk down to, the child. Although many of Lindgren's stories have a fantastic streak in them, they are firmly rooted in everyday life.

There has been a steady flow of Swedish children's fiction into this country over the years. Astrid Lindgren has been widely translated and re-translated. The twenty or so books about Thomas and his friends, Emma by Gunilla Woldé have been extremely successful since appearing in the mid 1970s, with

frequent reprints. Maria Gripe, whose books are always strikingly well written, is well represented—let us take two titles from the most of which were published early in this century, have always been extremely popular, and there has recently been a flood of reprints. There are also growing numbers of new Swedish authors who are abandoning realism for fantasy, represented in translation in this country by, for example, Sven Christopher Wahlberg, who writes about the occult, and Solveig Hiltner, who writes traditional fairy tales.

In presenting Swedish books in this country, cultural clashes are inevitable. There are many examples of major and minor changes that occur in the translation process to accommodate differences, sometimes showing a lack of regard for the fact that children's literature is a serious art form in Sweden. Sex-roles which are deliberately undifferentiated in Swedish books are often sharply re-defined in the English text. Changes range from slightly nervous additions, "at least you see, the sort of thing he normally does," to fundamental re-writing. In Gunilla Woldé's *Thomas and Sarah Dress Up*, for example, when the two children put on neckties to look like grand ladies, the English text informs us that Thomas is dressed up as the Lord Mayor, and Sarah as Mrs. Mayor, just one of numerous changes which alter the sense of the book.

A different sort of change is exemplified by the picture book *Pippi Take Care Of The Crickets*, published two years ago. Here a subtle, surrealist text, heavily charged with significance, was turned into a run-of-the-mill adventure story with magic and

fourth layers of meaning were lost. The four books in the series *Oh, Sees I Thought* caused a major upheaval when they were published in this country four years ago. The books all deal with various aspects of a young child's life, such as the death of a grandparent or the separation and divorce of parents. The Swedish text is written with care and sensitivity, and although this is not most literature, the books all deal well with these difficult subjects. When the English version appeared it was soon clear that parts of it had been completely re-written: the story-line had been pulled out, the characters' blunt sexual roles were replaced with sexual stereotypes, the adult appeared authoritarian, above all the assumption of companionate equality existing between adults and children had vanished. There are many other examples of this sort of radical re-writing of the work of Swedish authors.

There is no doubt that Swedish children's literature has different attitudes to the English. In Sweden children are seen as independent and responsible, trusted to develop their potential; complete people who are entitled to feel anger, fear, jealousy, grief, even sexual arousal. In this more obvious than in children's books and it remains to be seen to what extent some of the more extreme illustrations of these attitudes may eventually gain acceptance in this country.

Telling tales

By Gillian Cross

LEILA BERG:
Folk Tales
Illustrated by George Him.
Hodder and Stoughton, £4.45.
0 340 03394 0

EVE RICE:
Once in a Wood
Ten Tales From Aesop.
Bodley Head, £3.25.
0 370 30318 0

MARY MCCAFFREY:
The Mighty Muddle
Ed Pic.
Illustrated by Colin McNaughton.
0 906008 10 7

Storytelling used to be the most widely practised of all the arts. It is said, therefore, that Leila Berg should have felt it necessary to preface *Folk Tales* with an introduction "addressed to those adults who there is nothing about the introduction itself with its evocation of that relationship between narrator and listener which makes storytelling to small children such a pleasure. Even quite practised storytellers will find it full of valuable and illuminating advice that makes them rich to the audience.

The stories in the book are gathered from all parts of the

world. Some are familiar and others, like "Anansi and the Pudding Tree", less so. All alike are written in straightforward but skilful language and it is easy to see how a young child's life, such as the death of a grandparent or the separation and divorce of parents. The Swedish text is written with care and sensitivity, and although this is not most literature, the books all deal well with these difficult subjects. When the English version appeared it was soon clear that parts of it had been completely re-written: the story-line had been pulled out, the characters' blunt sexual roles were replaced with sexual stereotypes, the adult appeared authoritarian, above all the assumption of companionate equality existing between adults and children had vanished. There are many other examples of this sort of radical re-writing of the work of Swedish authors.

This becomes more apparent when one contrasts it with *Once in a Wood*, in which Eve Rice has retold and illustrated ten of Aesop's fables. Obviously designed for children still learning to read, *Once in a Wood* is set out in short, irregular lines, and white pictures and the text are reminiscent of those in school reading books. But the language is pedestrian and stilted and every fable ends with a limping rhymed couplet which is barely verse and does not look like verse on the page. This is irritating to an adult reader and would probably be even more disturbing to a child who could not read fluently but had a good ear for metre. The pictures are not striking and there seems nothing particularly to recommend the book.

Mary McCaffrey's *The Mighty Muddle*, on the other hand, is striking by its oddness. It is a little

square book, beautifully produced, with vigorous, funny illustrations by Colin McNaughton, and it consists of four eccentric stories. The basic plots are fairly standard: Jessy Cotter solves her junk shop by finding the archduchess's missing chair-leg; Ethelred King, the laundryman, gains royal patronage by inadvertently rescuing the Crown Jewels; a last prince becomes the pupil of a strange professor and learns things which help him rid his country of invaders. (Only the last story, about a sea captain's mentally unstable piano, is fundamentally original.)

What makes the book a pleasure to read is its exuberant inventiveness. Ethelred King, for example, spends his time in a cubbyhole, wistfully calculating the total value of the royal washing. Professor Pragmatic lives on potatoes and salad, varying his diet by stirring, while he eats, at paintings like "sprat with cat" or "eel with peal". The whole book overflows with such peculiarities. They make it, perhaps, a little wordy for successful reading aloud, but a delight for private reading. In many ways it is the complete opposite of Leila Berg's *Folk Tales*, being complicated and old white *Folk Tales*, aimed at a slightly younger readership, is simple and full of familiar patterns. But both books reveal pleasures in the tales being told and in the act of telling them. It is this which makes *Once in a Wood* so striking and there seems nothing particularly to recommend the book.

Not to conclude that the business of reading involves more difficulties than rewards.

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activities of Government action or as what instruments of policy should be used, it would be useful to have a serious inquiry into the civil service. Certainly a new book giving a thorough analysis of it would be welcome. *The Civil Service* is unfortunately of uneven quality. There are many excellent things in the book, but what it lacks is a certain initial hiss, well exemplified by its subtitle. And this bias seems very largely from the total commitment, with which it starts, to the Fulton Report, as the source of all wisdom on how the civil service should be organized and run. It is significant, in my view, that the three chapters contributed by Lord Croomer-Hunt—generally regarded as one of the most important authors, if not the "mole" of the Fulton Report—should be the least useful, precisely because they start with the implicit assumption that Fulton said the last word of any sense on the subject and are then concerned to show the almost criminal folly of not implementing Fulton to the letter.

Much of the description of how the civil service operates, how entry is secured, how interviews are held, is vivid and generally accurate, but only in the present situation of facts but also in the way it brings out those facts which are significant. If the book had not been so much concerned with the minutiae of Fulton, room might have been found for some comparison with other systems, such as the French with its *grandes écoles* and its ENA, particularly as their produce and, indeed, the system as a whole, are nowadays by no means free from criticism in France.

There is a very useful analysis of the numbers in the different categories of the civil service and the problems which proper definition presents. Many of the issues with which the book deals, for instance the question of secrecy, are genuine problems and a good many of the points made can be readily accepted even though the analysis errs in attributing to the civil service and to civil servants the main responsibility for maintaining those aspects of secrecy which are least defensible in a society such as ours. Here are, of course, many matters of Government policy which must be kept secret. However, where the objective need for secrecy can genuinely be questioned, it will often be found that secrecy is maintained not for bureaucratic reasons, but to avoid political embarrassment.

There is also a good deal of truth

in the accusation that the civil service is essentially an "establishment," and therefore prone to the weaknesses of any established institution. If any particular tendency can be detected, it is the excessive regard for continuity, though this is natural in a corps of men whose position is permanent or nearly so, while those who ultimately have the power and responsibility for the decisions in which civil servants only participate, i.e. ministers, have a relatively short effective life. However, continuity can and often does degenerate into bureaucracy and into excessive regard for precedent. A certain scepticism about the feasibility of rapid or substantial change is an attitude easily acquired and one which is often characteristic of those who see ministers come and go and policies change, and who not unnaturally conceive it to be their task somehow or other, through all these changes, to keep the machinery of state in good working order. It is a very real danger since a friend of the *Civil Service*, Lord Bridges, thought it an important part of the wisdom which a civil servant acquires not to fall even after seven circumambulations with a trumpet; but it is not always easy to have this worldly wisdom without it degenerating into cynicism. The quality of ministers is often such as to encourage just that.

Despite this tendency, the civil service has shown a considerable degree of adaptability to changing tasks imposed by successive governments which were themselves responding to the pressures of changing circumstances. The expansion of the service during the war, with the essential infusion of outside talent (which was, on the whole, welcomed by the "professionals"), its subsequent remarkably rapid shrinking after the war, the adaptation to such radical innovations as the National Health Service, or the nationalization of certain basic industries (whatever one may think of the policies that brought it about), the ebb and flow of regulation in the economy and financial spheres which alternation of political attitudes in the last thirty years has caused, all these show that the civil service as a whole can, on any objective judgment, be said to have been excessively slow to accommodate change. What is left-wing, complaints of an unduly laissez-faire tradition in the Service, and right-wing charges that civil servants are by nature interventionist, the chances are that—given the general structure of British government—the service manages to keep a reasonable balance.

As I have already said, the main feature of the book is its lack of wisdom of the Fulton Report. It rightly points to two important constraints under which the Fulton Committee laboured, for its terms of reference excluded consideration of any questions either on the machinery of government or on the relations between ministers and civil servants. It is, indeed, difficult to see how an inquiry into the civil service can produce meaningful results if these two subjects are to be forbidden territory, and the authors are probably right in suggesting that these restrictions were a deliberate brake imposed upon the Committee, though whether this was due to civil servants rather than to ministers is by no means clear.

Not that the second question at least is absent from the present authors' analysis. Indeed, a whole chapter, written by Lord Croomer-Hunt, is devoted to "Ministers and Ministers" and consists of a kind of argument, often contradictory, about the respective powers of each. After reading many instances, culled in the main from the crossman diaries and from the letters of the day, as well as others' experiences as junior ministers, and from outside advisers, whom recent governments have increasingly imported into the "machine", all of which tends to confirm a sort of conspiracy theory of civil service rule, one ends on a more balanced note.

The exact balance between ministerial and civil service power will very much depend on what is being decided, the political circumstances surrounding it, and the relative abilities of civil servants and ministers. The latter point is crucial. Certainly a minister with much less ability than his civil service advisers will inevitably not be able to make much personal impact on this committee-making process. The balance of ability can, in the end, determine the balance of power.

A similar uncertainty is seen in

the discussion about the transience of ministers and the consequent role of civil servants. While it may be broadly true that ministers change assignments more frequently than senior civil servants, the evidence is not quite clear-cut. There have been ministers who have stayed three or more years in one post and senior civil servants who have stayed less. In any event, in another section of the book the authors complain that civil servants move about too frequently and are, therefore, prevented from acquiring a real mastery of their jobs.

However, the most interesting and most debatable theme of the book, which was also the central theme of the Fulton Report, concerns the kind of person the civil service should seek to recruit and develop. Despite a voluminous report and the very many subjects dealt with, it is an exaggeration to say that the main aim of the Fulton reforms was to destroy what it considered to be the "cult of the generalist" in the upper reaches of the civil service, to replace what this book often calls the amateur (more often than not a civil servant) with the professional corps of specialists in either economic and financial or social matters, these being the two broad divisions into which government action was said to fall.

In developing the case against the generalist, Fulton and the present book make some telling points. The generalist, the "old-fashioned" first-class mind, who may have been trained in archaeology and he advising Chancellors on exchange rate policy or, after specializing in Homer, he administering the National Health Service. The "Rolls Royce" mind may be less serviceable in the modern world, but it is not self-evident, unless with a "technocratic" bias, it is, indeed, what is implicit in the book.

Examples of antiquated, dead failures of government, in recent decades for whom the blame is laid, are given. But this is the issue. It is whether the civil service is corrupt in regard to "Britain's Ruling Class" as real culprits responsible for the country's problems, and who, say, Fulton before them, have been called masculine or feminine as is lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex. Nor do we know sufficient about earlier cultures to be able to conclude that socially dominant throughout history.

Recent work shows that there are no discernible gender differences at birth. It is the parents that perceive infants in terms of gender, and not the infants who do so themselves. Is the social language and individual imagination that creates gender as it is lived by most people. Again, the documents are supplied: Rohrbach's is a most efficient handbook for feminist debate.

Then again, there is the "raging hormone" theory of female personality. What could be more fully, and she puts her case in clear and fairly non-technical language. The question she raises afresh is whether there is any essential or inherent reason dictated by biology why female personalities or behaviours should be different from male. Is anatomy destiny? The answer according to Professor Rohrbach's evidence and reasoning is a resounding "it is not".

According to her argument, it is social factors which account "for the huge gap between the sexes. The essential ingredient in those social factors is power: power as access to money, prestige, and advancement; power as the ability and the right to control the behaviour of others; power as the expression of dominance and ownership." If you are a man, you come out on top. If you are a woman, you are put down. You do not deserve to.

The argument has been put forward before, but not with Rohrbach's assemblage of experimental evidence. Shamefully, one of the chief instruments of this repression is psychology itself. She says that if a behaviour pattern is considered to be male, it was studied in men only; if it was considered to be female, it was studied in women only. . . . when the two sexes were compared, men always seemed to be better, for whatever they did, felt or thought was deemed as the norm for everyone, regardless of gender."

But this has all been, apparently, a gigantic confidence-trick, due to bad experimental design or bias of interpretation. "Psychology has been a male, rather than a human, science." It must make amends, and Professor Rohrbach does this in the most interesting female stereotype, not biology, that has determined women's place in society. It is clear that as more women enter the traditionally male preserve of psychology they begin to formulate questions that are relevant to their own gender identity. Indeed, much of the book shows, with careful documentation and criticism that though (in America) more options and freedoms are available to women than ever before, nevertheless "their personal lives are in many ways still frustrating and limiting."

According to this book, gender is learned or socially imposed behaviour. When a man contends that a woman's personality and social role are "just a matter of biology," he will often make comparisons with the male. "Males are dominant in natural animal groups, and in most human societies as well," so the argument runs, "even male babies are bigger, stronger, and more aggressive than female babies." Face it—male dominance is inborn, biological, natural, and inevitable. This theory, though, is unsupported by the existing evidence. Animal studies seem to have been discredited: the male can choose a species to prove his dominance. One likes and one dislikes, but neither from them is a prosocial statement about human beings. Though there is a broad pattern in human societies of males being more dominant, controlling the property and performing the more substantial tasks, the vast majority of these activities derive from

JOANNA BUNKER ROHRBACH: *Women: Psychology's Puzzle*. 505pp. Brighton: Harvester. £15.95. 0 85527 258 9

NIK DOUGLAS and PENNY SLINGER: *Sexual Secrets: The Alchemy of Ecstasy*. 383pp. Hutchinson. £8.95. 0 09 139130 X

On the science side we like to call them puzzles: on the arts side, mysteries or secrets. They are the ordinary stuff of living, yet they attract the severest disagreement. Perhaps the secrets are the answers to the puzzles, except that the only secrets worth knowing may be the ones everybody knew all along.

Joanna Bunker Rohrbach has given us a formidable source-book on the bloody-mindedness of the male. In the form of a thorough guide to up-to-date experimental psychology, it offers us reasons why we should, as rational people, attend very seriously to the feminist case. She examines the recent work carefully, and she puts her case in clear and fairly non-technical language. The question she raises afresh is whether there is any essential or inherent reason dictated by biology why female personalities or behaviours should be different from male. Is anatomy destiny? The answer according to Professor Rohrbach's evidence and reasoning is a resounding "it is not".

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Male and female create we them

By Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle

culture to culture. In some cultures the sex differences do not exist. If this can happen, then the pattern "cannot be based purely or even primarily on biological sex differences." As Margaret Mead argued as long ago as the 1930s, "traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex." Nor do we know sufficient about earlier cultures to be able to conclude that socially dominant throughout history.

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arguments outwards from personality and behaviour to the woman's place in society, maintaining the same standard of clear argument supported by recorded observation. In American society sex-role stereotypes are alive and well, and this is clear in the media images of women, marriage and motherhood and the position and difficulties of "single women" including lesbians. There is also still the "underachievement syndrome", the "willing to fail" the fear that a woman may have that if she is too clever she will never gain acceptance. The professional woman succeeds, if she does, against all odds.

Professor Rohrbach's conclusion is that all the assumptions about "what it means to be female" must be re-examined. Women are not struggling to acquire "masculine qualities" but rather for "personal and social acceptance of those masculine qualities they already have".

It is suggested that there might be a solution in the adoption of androgyny as the norm, particularly in mental health problems, where women come off especially badly. Androgyny denotes "an integration of positive masculine and feminine behaviours or traits". This could be the secret that solves the puzzle, since experimental studies quoted by Rohrbach demonstrate that "non androgynous students showed a behavioral deficit of one sort or another" and that not only can an individual be both highly masculine and highly feminine, but is more likely "to view himself or herself more positively than someone who scores high on only masculinity or femininity".

What is not clear from *Psychology's Puzzle* is, if sex differences are learnt and socially conditioned, whether there is a sex can contribute to society or individual relationships that are particular to her sex or more accessible to it. Professor Rohrbach appears to be saying "no", but from the facts that she herself adduces, the position remains by no means as straightforward. The inconsistency slips through when she relaxes her grip, and first appears quite openly on "I certainly would not argue that there are no basic biological differences between the sexes. The question, however, is whether there are biological differences that affect the organs of life besides reproduction." And again: "In spite of many technical studies and review articles that indicate that males and females have essentially the same abilities—except, of course, for their genitalia and reproductive capacities—both scientists and the general public continue to argue that anatomy is destiny." That is a pretty big "except of course".

In the first place, it is a remarkable exposure to bear a child, as Professor Rohrbach acknowledges. No more than a shadow of this experience, the creation of persons out of one's own body, is available to the male. By the same token, if the genitalia and reproductive capacities are considered to be the bearers of significant experiences, or channels of knowledge, there are at least six thresholds particular to the woman and not available to the man. According to Natalie Shalnos, there are: menarche, development of breasts, defloration, pregnancy, delivery and menopause (one could also add conception and lactation). Margaret Murray has argued that the "quickening of the baby is the Genesis of Rite" in a book of that title. Any profound bodily event, whether it is a difficult period or a failed suicide attempt, can be the source of what the psychologists call "arousal", and the occasion for new perception and creative growth. It is, in the strictest sense, "carnal knowledge". Capacities like these do of course carry a corresponding vulnerability to coercion or victimization.

Then again, there is that matter of the unreality of the male body-image. One of Professor Rohrbach's research certificates, in a book of that title, is a kind of water-drift, the weight of whose body-fruits do not pull him below the surface of existence (one might retort that he is not so likely to drown there either). Could that uncertainty, with its body, be a

ghost, be a source of that aggression which the research results note also as a male constant? Aggression that murderously distinguishes the body-image of other people because the body seems to be a trivial reality is, as we now see in the world, likely to be maladaptive beyond a certain stage of evolution. The actual and realistic perception of one's physical being, an easy and direct relation with physical reality, and a pleasurable respect for one's own body and other people's, might be seen as a human gift to be valued. The research quoted by Rohrbach appears to show that this gift is a prerogative of women to the point of ecstasies, a secondary source of this may be because the female body is anchored in the strong rhythms of the menstrual cycle. Whatever the source, it is again a "carnal knowledge" and we cannot, as the research shows, go on using this term as a pejorative.

And once again, those "genitalia". Nobody can now deny that under favourable conditions women are capable of a more intense and prolonged sexuality than most men are. Generalized skin sensitivity, the point of ecstasies, a secondary sexual characteristic of the female and not the male. Is not the skin an organ of knowledge? Are we to follow an earlier time, and deny that sexuality is a channel of perception and knowledge? Even in Professor Rohrbach's terms, the scientific evidence is all on the side of believing that this aspect of sex difference is inherent, though of course it can either unfold or flower, or be repressed by social conditioning.

In *Sexual Secrets*, by Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger, we find a world that curiously mirrors images Professor Rohrbach's. Similar ideas are there, in a different focus, and with other proportions. Outer fact is all important to Rohrbach, inner fact is the study in *Sexual Secrets*.

The women in Professor Rohrbach are puppets of society, and have little inner life; the Tautou students of Douglas and Slinger are self-determining, and rather full of themselves. To the latter, introspection and imagination are all-important and closely defined as techniques, while Professor Rohrbach's book has a rather vestigial sense of such things despite the fact that much of the research is conditioned by the imaginations of society and individuals about gender.

The chief theme of *Sexual Secrets* is what is chiefly missing in *Psychology's Puzzle*; that the two sexes can learn from one another a great deal about physical and mental life. Man here still acknowledges as swiftly capable of oppression, but that is only one scenario. His "yang-force" can certainly overcome and coerce the woman; but so can the "yin-force" of the woman, short-circuiting the man's secret is said to be in the mingling of these two essences; in learnt androgyny. Woman, we are told, is inexhaustibly sexual, but not insatiably, and man can learn to be a glass or focus to her abundant energies. Each becomes "the initiator of the other, in this book, and this is done, reflecting Professor Rohrbach's argument that gender is learnt, by learning the other gender, so far as that is possible to the adult. Even *Psychology's Puzzle* hints (following Jung) that both sex and gender can be transcended by the mingling and interaction of animals, the imagined man in the woman, with within the woman symbolized within the man. With proper care for each other's individual qualities of sexuality, the man can follow and match the multi-organisms of the woman.

"O brave new world, That has such people in't!" Does *Sexual Secrets* then solve the Puzzle? Were it fully adapted to the needs of Westerners,



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The following have agreed to serve on the panel of judges this year: LORD BOYLE (chairman), DAN JACOBSON, FRANCIS WYNDHAM, DAVID WATT, MIRIAM CROSS

Submissions should be sponsored either by the editor of the publication in which the article appeared, or by the organization which commissioned the pamphlet. No entry will be considered unless it is so sponsored.

The closing date for receipt of entries is 8 August 1980. The National Book League has now taken over the administration of the George Orwell Memorial Prize. All entries should be addressed to Barbara Buckler, National Book League, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

Palimpsests of stone

By Priscilla Metcalf

GERALD COBB: *English Cathedrals The Forgotten Centuries*. 176pp. Thames and Hudson. £15. 0 500 34080 3

ANTHONY NEW: *A Guide to the Cathedrals of Britain*. 462pp. Constable. £4.95. 0 09 462350 3

Concern for our cathedrals is growing, and so is the number of books about them. The two under review could hardly be more different but both are valuable, one as a key to a few choice palimpsests (and herbage, one hopes of more), the other as a universal pocketbook of a rather superior type.

Gerald Cobb has for years been collecting graphic and documentary evidence for the changes in our greater medieval churches after the Middle Ages were over. More than any other kind of building the cathedral can be likened to the palimpsest: written on and scraped, re-inscribed, scraped, while tantalizing traces of old texts still show through the latest testimony to man's selective memory. With English cathedrals such processes accelerated after the Reformation. Mr Cobb's purpose "is to draw attention to many mutilations and restorations of our greater churches during the past four centuries, and so demonstrate the necessity for at least a superficial knowledge of their architectural history, since the Dissolution of the monasteries if we are to assess their true value and loyalties of medieval building and craft is a ship." And so he offers from his archives tantalizing traces of some neglected passages in the history of the Church of England. His publisher has only allowed him ten great churches: Ely, Peterborough, Salisbury, Winchester, Lichfield, and Worcester. He adds Bath, Beverley, and Salby, with a short chapter and several pages of

fascinating illustrations on each, and an introduction referring to a few others.

Old views of familiar scenes when properly annotated can be a goldmine for those who digged. Take Ely, where we know Gilbert Scott rebuilt the lantern over the Octagon: here we are given not only a pre-1863 photograph showing what Scott replaced—James Essex's quite different lantern of a century earlier—but also Thomas Willis's plan of 1730 showing what Essex replaced, looking much like what Scott was to put there: in other words, Scott was reproducing something that had been there, not indulging his fertile Victorian Gothic fancy. Cobb has long thought that the English Baroque architect Hawksmoor, with his taste for medieval profiles, must have based his St George-in-the-East tower design on an earlier Ely lantern like the present one.

For Lichfield, Cobb damaged in the Civil War, Cobb shows Hall's plan view of the west front and points out that it may well have included the majestic Christ figure now in Swinerton church, three miles away: that statue's cathedral quality, though not its provenance, was recognized by Pevsner in his *Staffordshire*, but its presumed provenance, an Lichfield's west gable, probably via the bishop's palace at Beccleshill, had been recognized by Lathaby and others. The figure is said to be of sundstone, doubtless purposely of a lighter tone than its original setting, so as to dominate the rest of the carved population there. Cobb then has a good time with James Wyatt at Lichfield, starting his cathedral-restoration career, and Wyatt's very articulate contemporary critics. Though it appears from a recent article by John M. Rice, that the four western choir-bays were already walled off from the aisles in the seventeenth century, before Wyatt did the same with the four eastern ones, and a glazed screen for the crossing arch was only added after Wyatt's death, it is not understandable if it is not. (Ruskin said the "old" English cathedrals sent him to Italy. A splendid open medieval screen (by then those great Gables were available) And with the introduction appear two historic photo-

